

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
October 16, 2002**

The regular meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 11:00 a.m., on October 16, 2002, in Room 1D2 of the Transportation Building in Olympia, Washington.

Commissioners present were: Aubrey Davis, Ed Barnes, Elmira Forner, George Kargianis, A. Michèle Maher, Chris Marr and Connie Niva.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

It was moved by Commissioner Barnes and seconded by Commissioner Maher, to approve the minutes of the September 18 & 19, 2002 Commission meeting. The motion was approved unanimously.

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION ADMINISTRATOR REPORT

Chris Rose, Administrator, briefed the Commission on the upcoming local area Commission meeting in Chehalis on November 7, 2002. He stated that the meeting would cover statewide issues, the results of the ballot measures and current transportation issues. There will be a roundtable discussion on the I-5 corridor that will include local officials and community leaders. The discussion will also include a report from the I-5 Partnership. There will be a roundtable discussion covering rural economic developments that will include US 12 and SR 6 in Lewis County and Pacific County areas.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY REPORT

Secretary MacDonald introduced Tony Allen, State Geo Technical Engineer, who received an award of recognition, from the International Geosynthetics Society for research work regarding the determination of the long-term strength of geosynthetics. Mr. Allen thanked the Department for the opportunity to develop a methodology to determine the long-term durability of geosynthetics. He explained that geosynthetics is an oil based-product that is composed of a combination of polypropylene, high-density polyethylene and polyester. It is used in the reinforcement of unstable slopes to prevent erosion and in place of steel to reinforce concrete. As a result of the ability to determine the durability of the material the cost of the material has dropped 50 percent over the last several years saving the Department hundreds of thousands of dollars in many projects.

Secretary MacDonald distributed the new edition of Key Facts to the Commission and pointed out that the document has undergone substantial revisions. He requested that the Commission review it and provide any feedback to the Department by December in order to include changes in 2003 version.

Secretary MacDonald described his attendance at the annual meeting of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) in Alaska. He stated that the members discussed TEA-21 reauthorization, particularly a proposal to create a federal transportation financing corporation to enable states to bond their share of the federal gas tax in order to invest in more immediate relief of traffic congestion. AASHTO members continue to support seeking additional federal funding for highways and transit. Secretary MacDonald stated Washington, Oregon and California all share seismic concerns that need to be emphasized at a national level in order for these states to receive funding for highway improvements. He stated that he would continue to seek congressional recognition of the unique circumstances of the west coast states.

Secretary MacDonald reported that he attend the Tribal Transportation Conference and the Tacoma Narrows Bridge Groundbreaking ceremony.

Secretary MacDonald stated that in the event Referendum 51 does not pass, there would be a possible reduction in force of 600 FTEs within the Department. He asked Paula Hammond, Chief of Staff, to brief the Commission on the impact of Referendum 51. Ms. Hammond stated that Referendum 51 would increase the gas tax by 9 cents over a two year period, would add a 1 percent sales tax on new and used vehicle purchases, a 30 percent gross weight fee for vehicles over 10,000 pounds and increase bonding. Washington State's dependence on gas tax for transportation spending is greater than 38 other states. Washington's 23-cent gas tax ranks as 22nd among the 50 states, with 11 cents of the gas tax going to county roads and city streets. She stated that since 1980 Washington's population has increased by 43 percent and jobs are up by 58 percent. Along with an increase in the population vehicle registration has increased by 57 percent, ferry passenger ridership has increased by 59 percent, transit and vanpool ridership has increased by 75 percent. She stated that vehicle miles driven since 1980 are up 88 percent, which represents that the public is driving a lot more than in 1980. Ms. Hammond stated that the state's investment in transportation infrastructure has not kept pace with growth. She provided an overview of projects that would be funded under Referendum 51 including state highway traffic safety improvements, city and county roads, ferries, rail system improvements and public transportation. About \$4.4 billion or 80 percent of the proposed state highway spending would be invested in projects with safety improvements such as: straightening curves, widening lanes and shoulders, replacing intersections with interchanges, adding signals, turn lanes and extending on and off ramps. She concluded that many top safety location projects are already included in the current law.

Dave Dye, Administrator, Urban Corridors, provided an overview of Puget Sound projects that would be funded by Referendum 51. He stated that there are projects located both within the urban growth boundaries and outside the boundaries. Mr. Dye pointed out that all of the projects support planned growth and densification efforts. He stated that there would not be enough money in Referendum 51 to complete all of the projects around the region, but critical first phases would be completed.

Bill Starkey, Transportation Funds Manager, addressed the distribution of Referendum 51 funds throughout the state. Mr. Starkey provided a draft analysis of donor/recipient counties ranked by agricultural employment. The analysis chart showed population and employment data, 10-year historical revenues and expenditures, current state route lane miles, 10-year future revenues and expenditures and 20-year aggregate revenues and expenditures, under both a scenario of current law funding only and a scenario combining current law and Referendum 51 funding.

PUBLIC AND LEGISLATOR COMMENT PERIOD

Kurt Kingman, a citizen from Matlock, expressed his concerns about prevailing wage laws impacting the cost of transportation projects. He stated that the state of Washington could save a substantial amount of money by repealing the prevailing wage law. He commented that the state of Oregon performed a study in 1995 and found that prevailing wage inflates construction costs. He stated that another concern of his is excessive costs of environmental mitigation efforts and their impact on the cost of transportation projects. Commissioner Marr responded that prevailing wage is a legislative issue, and environmental law is primarily federal law. Mr. Kingman stated that his school board has taken on these kinds of issues and gotten laws changed, and he feels that the Commission should be willing to work with the Legislature in repealing the law. Commissioner Barnes offered to exchange information with Mr. Kingman on prevailing wage law impacts.

COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Commissioner Maher reported attending the Good Roads and Transportation annual meeting in Richland, the Bicycle Pedestrian Safety Conference in Spokane, and the TPEAC meeting in Pasco.

Commissioner Forner reported attending the Community Airport Association meeting, North Central Washington RTP and the Wenatchee Valley Transportation Metropolitan Planning Organization meeting.

Commissioner Marr reported that he has been involved with light rail issues, and is currently working with the downtown Spokane business community regarding the I-90 Viaduct.

Commissioner Niva reported attending the Puget Sound Regional Council HOV Leadership group meeting, and found that there were very strong feelings about the HOV evaluation. She also attended Group Health Cooperative's dinner in honor of Commissioner Davis' lifetime achievement in healthcare. Commissioner Niva commented that Commissioner Davis' award is an excellent example of the Commission's diverse background.

Commissioner Barnes reported on his trip to the Tribal Transportation Conference. He reported attending a Vancouver Chamber of Commerce forum on Referendum 51, and the Tacoma Narrows Bridge groundbreaking. Commissioner Barnes stated that Governor Locke

and Governor Kitzhaber will be in Vancouver on October 31 for a presentation of the I-5 Partnership plan.

Commissioner Kargianis reported meeting with Mike Thorne, CEO, Washington State Ferries, to review the status of WSF vessel replacement program. He reported meeting with Charlie Howard, Director, Policy and Planning, regarding SR-99 and the Alaska Way Viaduct as an alternative route to I-5. He commented that he continues to attend the I-405 Executive Committee meetings.

Commissioner Davis reported attending the Mega Projects Conference, Tribal Transportation Conference, Puget Sound Regional Council and I-405 Committee meeting. He also reported that he met with Representative Ruth Fisher and Representative Frank Chopp to discuss transportation issues.

CENTRAL PUGET SOUND HOV SYSTEM EVALUATION

Charlie Howard summarized the findings from the HOV lanes variable hours of operation evaluation. The HOV lanes provide a definite travel time advantage in all corridors during the day, and are most heavily used during the peak commute times. They do not provide a travel time advantage after 8:00 p.m. and before 5:00 a.m. Weekend HOV use conditions tend to mirror General Purpose lane conditions. Transit service and ridership decreases dramatically after 8:00 p.m., but transit speed and reliability could be impacted during the midday in high volume locations. Transit ridership and service levels during weekends are far below weekday levels. A high percentage of vehicles are HOV eligible on the weekends. The Department has also found that the freeway HOV system is important for vanpools, as 90% operate during peak hours. Most of the vanpools operating outside of peak hours travel at times when there is no congestion. Vanpool use is growing. The Department found that there would be a negligible effect on merging collisions, and safety improvements would address the potential increase in run-off-the-road collisions. Environmental impacts are minor or non-existent.

In reviewing the experience of other states, the Department found that both peak hour and all-day HOV policies are used. Large metropolitan areas tend to have uniform HOV policies, and tend to have few system-wide changes. Where there have been changes in policy, the trend has been towards less restrictive policies. Consultation with the FHWA and FTA has revealed that while FHWA must agree with changes in HOV lane operation, there would be no sanctions for changes so long as HOV lanes are reserved for HOVs during peak hours. FTA funding formulas would not be impacted. Sound Transit has expressed concern about their investment in direct access ramps.

The cost to implement sign changes would be approximately \$2 million, assuming the signs are fixed rather than dynamic. Four million dollars would be needed to make safety improvements to the system. Midday openings would likely require additional safety improvements, at additional expense. Commissioner Davis asked Mr. Howard to

examine whether it would be possible to fund the signage and safety improvements out of the current Department appropriation.

An analysis of public opinion regarding HOV hours of operations found that there is overwhelming support for maintaining HOV lanes during commute hours, but public opinion is sharply divided over opening HOV lanes to all traffic in off-peak hours. People who drive alone are more likely to favor opening HOV lanes to all traffic during off-peak hours.

Mr. Howard indicated that the Department would return in November for a decision from the Commission. If the Commission tentatively decides to change the hours of operation, a public comment period will follow, with a final decision in January.

URBAN CORRIDORS OFFICE REPORT

Dave Dye, Administrator, Urban Corridors, introduced Craig Stone, Urban Projects Director for the I-405 and SR 509 projects. Mr. Stone provided a progress report concerning the I-405 project. He reported that the I-405 project had achieved the record-of-decision milestone. He outlined the details of the proposed improvements in the entire corridor, including the early environmental actions that would be taken. He described the portions of the corridor that would be improved with revenues from Referendum 51, which include the SR167/I-405 interchange, improvements near Bellevue addressing the “Wilburton Weave,” and improvements in the Kirkland/Bothell area. The Department would also invest in design for the entire corridor, and advance environmental work for the corridor. Mr. Stone also described the investments that are being discussed by the Regional Transportation Investment District, which could amount to between \$2 billion and \$3.5 billion worth of investments. Mr. Stone mentioned that design charrettes were held in Renton, Bellevue, Kirkland and Bothell, and public open houses are scheduled for Kirkland, Renton and Bellevue during late October.

Mr. Stone also provided a progress report concerning the SR 509 project. He reviewed the basic components of the extension of SR 509 to I-5, and the improvements that would be made on I-5 south of the interchange connecting the two freeways. The project level Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) will soon be issued, which will document among other things the improved fish passage and stream conditions, the extension of the Des Moines Creek bike path and the reduced impacts to wetlands and parks. The Department has worked with the resource agencies and local agencies to improve and protect the Des Moines Creek Drainage Basin. Mr. Stone also described the ongoing design work, including the value engineering studies being undertaken to reduce the cost and improve the serviceability of the project. The Department is following context-sensitive design principles in the design work. The Department is also negotiating a number of land trades to reduce costs and increase benefits to both the Department and the local jurisdictions. Mr. Stone informed the Commission that Referendum 51 would pay for \$500 million of the project cost, while the Regional Transportation Investment District is discussing funding the remaining \$400 million. The

next steps are to issue the FEIS and obtain the Record of Decision and permits, finalize the storm water and geometric design, begin property purchases and relocations, select the General Engineering Consultant for construction management, and contract for a design/build team.

The Commission meeting adjourned at 4:50 p.m. on October 16, 2002.